

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

FRANK IRWINE,

Plaintiff,

v.

GAVIN NEWSOM, et al.,

Defendant.

No. 2:20-cv-0420 AC P

ORDER AND FINDINGS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

Plaintiff, a state prisoner proceeding pro se, seeks relief pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and has requested leave to proceed in forma pauperis pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915.

I. Application to Proceed In Forma Pauperis

Plaintiff has submitted a declaration that makes the showing required by 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a). ECF Nos. 2, 5. Accordingly, the request to proceed in forma pauperis will be granted.

Plaintiff is required to pay the statutory filing fee of \$350.00 for this action. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1914(a), 1915(b)(1). By this order, plaintiff will be assessed an initial partial filing fee in accordance with the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1). By separate order, the court will direct the appropriate agency to collect the initial partial filing fee from plaintiff's trust account and forward it to the Clerk of the Court. Thereafter, plaintiff will be obligated for monthly payments of twenty percent of the preceding month's income credited to plaintiff's prison trust account. These payments will be forwarded by the appropriate agency to the Clerk of the Court each time

1 the amount in plaintiff's account exceeds \$10.00, until the filing fee is paid in full. 28 U.S.C.
2 § 1915(b)(2).

3 II. Statutory Screening of Prisoner Complaints

4 The court is required to screen complaints brought by prisoners seeking relief against a
5 governmental entity or officer or employee of a governmental entity. 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(a). The
6 court must dismiss a complaint or portion thereof if the prisoner has raised claims that are
7 "frivolous, malicious, or fail[] to state a claim upon which relief may be granted," or that "seek[]
8 monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief." 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b).

9 A claim "is [legally] frivolous where it lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact."
10 Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989); Franklin v. Murphy, 745 F.2d 1221, 1227-28 (9th
11 Cir. 1984). "[A] judge may dismiss . . . claims which are 'based on indisputably meritless legal
12 theories' or whose 'factual contentions are clearly baseless.'" Jackson v. Arizona, 885 F.2d 639,
13 640 (9th Cir. 1989) (quoting Neitzke, 490 U.S. at 327), superseded by statute on other grounds as
14 stated in Lopez v. Smith, 203 F.3d 1122, 1130 (9th Cir. 2000). The critical inquiry is whether a
15 constitutional claim, however inartfully pleaded, has an arguable legal and factual basis.
16 Franklin, 745 F.2d at 1227-28 (citations omitted).

17 "Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8(a)(2) requires only 'a short and plain statement of the
18 claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief,' in order to 'give the defendant fair notice of
19 what the . . . claim is and the grounds upon which it rests.'" Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550
20 U.S. 544, 555 (2007) (alteration in original) (quoting Conley v. Gibson, 355 U.S. 41, 47 (1957)).
21 "Failure to state a claim under § 1915A incorporates the familiar standard applied in the context
22 of failure to state a claim under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6)." Wilhelm v. Rotman,
23 680 F.3d 1113, 1121 (9th Cir. 2012) (citations omitted). In order to survive dismissal for failure
24 to state a claim, a complaint must contain more than "a formulaic recitation of the elements of a
25 cause of action;" it must contain factual allegations sufficient "to raise a right to relief above the
26 speculative level." Twombly, 550 U.S. at 555 (citations omitted). "[T]he pleading must contain
27 something more . . . than . . . a statement of facts that merely creates a suspicion [of] a legally
28 cognizable right of action." Id. (alteration in original) (quoting 5 Charles Alan Wright & Arthur

1 R. Miller, Federal Practice and Procedure § 1216 (3d ed. 2004)).

2 “[A] complaint must contain sufficient factual matter, accepted as true, to ‘state a claim to
3 relief that is plausible on its face.’” Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (quoting
4 Twombly, 550 U.S. at 570). “A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual
5 content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the
6 misconduct alleged.” Id. (citing Twombly, 550 U.S. at 556). In reviewing a complaint under this
7 standard, the court must accept as true the allegations of the complaint in question, Hosp. Bldg.
8 Co. v. Trs. of the Rex Hosp., 425 U.S. 738, 740 (1976) (citation omitted), as well as construe the
9 pleading in the light most favorable to the plaintiff and resolve all doubts in the plaintiff’s favor,
10 Jenkins v. McKeithen, 395 U.S. 411, 421 (1969) (citations omitted).

11 III. Complaint

12 The complaint alleges that various defendants have been violating plaintiff’s rights under
13 the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments. ECF No. 1. Specifically, plaintiff alleges that the water
14 he is being provided with is contaminated, posing a risk to his health, and that defendants have
15 failed to issue any kind of notification about the contamination. Id. at 1-16. Plaintiff further
16 states that none of his claims have been exhausted because he is not required to exhaust
17 administrative remedies under the California Whistleblower’s Act. Id. at 6, 12, 14.

18 IV. Failure to Exhaust

19 Because plaintiff is a prisoner suing over the conditions of his confinement, his claims are
20 subject to the Prison Litigation Reform Act (PLRA), 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(a). Under the PLRA,
21 “[n]o action shall be brought with respect to prison conditions under section 1983 of this title, or
22 any other Federal law, by a prisoner confined in any jail, prison, or other correctional facility until
23 such administrative remedies as are available are exhausted.” 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(a); Porter v.
24 Nussle, 534 U.S. 516, 520 (2002) (“§ 1997e(a)’s exhaustion requirement applies to all prisoners
25 seeking redress for prison circumstances or occurrences”). “[T]hat language is ‘mandatory’: An
26 inmate ‘shall’ bring ‘no action’ (or said more conversationally, may not bring any action) absent
27 exhaustion of available administrative remedies.” Ross v. Blake, 136 S. Ct. 1850, 1857 (2016)
28 (quoting Woodford v. Ngo, 548 U.S. 81, 85 (2006); Jones v. Bock, 549 U.S. 199, 211 (2007)).

Dismissal for failure to state a claim is appropriate where “a failure to exhaust is clear on the face of the complaint.” Albino v. Baca, 747 F.3d 1162, 1166 (9th Cir. 2014) (defendant may move for dismissal under Rule 12(b)(6) where exhaustion is clear on the face of the complaint); Davis v. Cal. Dep’t of Corr. and Rehab., 474 F. App’x 606, 607 (9th Cir. 2012) (district court properly dismissed case where it was clear on face of complaint that administrative remedies were not exhausted prior to filing). When the district court concludes that the prisoner has not exhausted administrative remedies on a claim, “the proper remedy is dismissal of the claim without prejudice.” Wyatt v. Terhune, 315 F.3d 1108, 1120 (9th Cir. 2003) (citation omitted), overruled on other grounds by Albino, 747 F.3d at 1168.

Plaintiff’s represents that he has not exhausted administrative remedies because he is not required to under the California Whistleblower’s Act. ECF No. 1 at 6, 12, 14. However, plaintiff is attempting to bring his claims under § 1983, and state law cannot relieve him of him of the obligation imposed by federal law to exhaust administrative remedies prior to filing a federal civil rights lawsuit. Accordingly, the complaint should be dismissed without prejudice. Plaintiff can bring his federal claims in a new action once he has exhausted his administrative remedies.

V. No Leave to Amend

In dismissing a complaint, leave to amend should be granted if it appears possible that the defects in the complaint could be corrected, especially if a plaintiff is pro se. Lopez v. Smith, 203 F.3d 1122, 1130-31 (9th Cir. 2000) (en banc); Cato v. United States, 70 F.3d 1103, 1106 (9th Cir. 1995) (“A pro se litigant must be given leave to amend his or her complaint, and some notice of its deficiencies, unless it is absolutely clear that the deficiencies of the complaint could not be cured by amendment.” (citing Noll v. Carlson, 809 F.2d 1446, 1448 (9th Cir. 1987))). However, if, after careful consideration, it is clear that a complaint cannot be cured by amendment, the court may dismiss without leave to amend. Cato, 70 F.3d at 1005-06. Because amendment would not cure plaintiff’s failure to exhaust prior to initiating this lawsuit, leave to amend would be futile. The complaint should therefore be dismissed without leave to amend.

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VI. Plain Language Summary of this Order for a Pro Se Litigant

Your request to proceed in forma pauperis is granted and you are not required to pay the entire filing fee immediately.

It is being recommended that your case be dismissed without prejudice because you did not exhaust your administrative remedies before you filed the complaint. Once you exhaust your administrative remedies, you can bring your claims in a new complaint.

In accordance with the above, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that:

1. Plaintiff's request for leave to proceed in forma pauperis (ECF No. 2) is granted.


2. Plaintiff is obligated to pay the statutory filing fee of \$350.00 for this action. Plaintiff is assessed an initial partial filing fee in accordance with the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1). All fees shall be collected and paid in accordance with this court's order to the Director of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation filed concurrently herewith.

3. The Clerk of the Court shall randomly assign a United States District Judge to this action.

IT IS FURTHER RECOMMENDED that the case be dismissed without prejudice for failure to exhaust administrative remedies.

These findings and recommendations are submitted to the United States District Judge assigned to the case, pursuant to the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1). Within twenty-one days after being served with these findings and recommendations, any party may file written objections with the court and serve a copy on all parties. Such a document should be captioned "Objections to Magistrate Judge's Findings and Recommendations." Plaintiff is advised that failure to file objections within the specified time may waive the right to appeal the District Court's order. Martinez v. Ylst, 951 F.2d 1153 (9th Cir. 1991).

DATED: July 27, 2020


ALLISON CLAIRE
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE